



# News Release

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## **Washington youths exercising more, eating better**

*35,000 more kids are meeting exercise guidelines*

**OLYMPIA** — Washington's young people are exercising more, drinking less soda pop, and taking advantage of healthier food choices in schools.

That's the indication from the 2010 Healthy Youth Survey, which shows that obesity rates for Washington's youth haven't gone up since the 2008 survey was completed. About 10 percent or more of eighth, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders are obese – boys more than girls.

Nationally, poor nutrition and lack of exercise have led to more and more overweight kids – a disturbing sign for the future.

"Obese children are more likely to become obese adults," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "That's why changes during the school years in physical activity and nutrition will improve our youths' health for the rest of their lives."

In the past two years, an estimated 35,000 more Washington youth have met physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes a day, five days a week. Fewer sixth-graders, but more eighth, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders, met the guidelines. In addition to the many health benefits of good nutrition and regular exercise, a growing number of studies link both physical activity and healthy weights to better brain development and performance, as reflected in grades.

On the nutrition front, kids are drinking fewer sodas. The rate of drinking two or more sodas a day among kids in eighth, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grades has dropped by half since 2002. The percentage of eighth and 10<sup>th</sup>-graders who drink soda pop and other sugar-sweetened beverages at school every day has declined steadily since 2006.

The numbers changed after school districts throughout the state developed wellness policies to address their students' health.

An example is the work of the Highline School District in South King County. The district used input from parents, students, employees, and community members to change policy and to set up guidelines for physical activity, nutrition, and health education in all of its schools. The input covered foods and drinks offered in the schools. Soda pop, energy drinks, and high-sugar drinks are out, while water, 100 percent juices, and non-fat milk are in. Candy, cookies and cakes are gone, but kids can buy fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and low-fat cheese.

In the Olympia School District in Thurston County, similar policy changes ensured that the students have healthy food choices. The extensive guidelines cover the lunch program as well as the school vending machines, student stores, fund-raising sales, clubs, activities, organizations, and any other food available on campus.

In spite of these successes, challenges remain. For example, while obesity rates for eighth, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> -graders did not go up from 2002 to 2010, the number of 10<sup>th</sup>-graders who were above normal weight (i.e., overweight), but not yet obese, increased significantly. Overweight youth have an increased risk of physical ailments now, and of becoming obese in the future.

Many kids are obese before they even enter school. National data show that one of three children is obese or overweight before turning five. Obese children are more likely to have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type-2 diabetes, which are risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Research shows that the healthier the students are, the more prepared they are to learn.

More than 212,000 students, in 235 districts and 1,049 schools statewide took the 2010 Healthy Youth Survey. It tracks health behaviors and attitudes of sixth, eighth, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Taking place every two years, this anonymous survey is a joint effort of [six different state agencies](#).

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at <a href="http://www.doh.wa.gov">http://www.doh.wa.gov</a> for a healthy dose of information.
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